



COUNTRY PROFILE



caption caption

OVERVIEW

In a region with notable cases of failed or failing states, Benin established a government that largely respects basic rights and freedoms. It has a recent history of credible elections with a peaceful change of power. The March 2006 presidential elections resulted in the fourth peaceful turnover since democracy was reestablished in the early 1990s. The new president, Dr. Thomas Boni Yayi, has pledged to fight corruption and ineffective management and to promote economic growth.



PROGRAMS

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

A chief challenge to the evolution of Benin's democratic system is to counterbalance a strong tradition of centralized authority. Community participation helps ensure that the government responds to the needs and interests of its citizens. USAID technical assistance promotes decentralization and devolution of authorities to local communities. Members of locally elected councils and local development groups have received training to help them develop their planning, decision-making, and advocacy skills. This enables them to have a greater say in health and education services in their communities. In addition to promoting transparent and accountable management in local government, USAID technical assistance has also helped to improve the productivity of small farmers and producers in targeted areas of Benin and reinforce the capacities of local microfinance institutions. USAID promotes better governance in central government by providing training in international accounting standards to senior auditors within the Government of Benin.

USAID has worked closely with the Government of Benin and donors to reduce child trafficking. A major victory in the battle to end this practice occurred when the National Assembly passed the anti-child trafficking law on January 30, 2006.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Education is a critical sector for sustained economic growth, improved health, and continued democratization. Literacy rates in Benin are low, especially among young people. Girls are particularly affected. Since 1990 Benin has made significant inroads in reforming its education system and broadening access to education. USAID's education program focuses on

BENIN SNAPSHOT

Date of independence: 1960
Population: 6.9 million (2004)
Income per person: \$530 (yr)

Source: World Bank Development Indicators

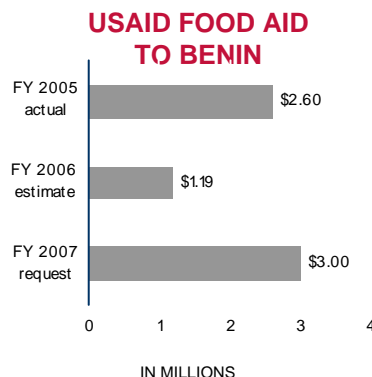
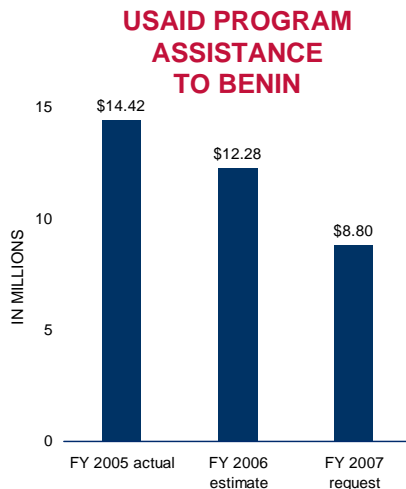
USAID IN BENIN

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COUNTRY PROFILE CONTINUED



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FY2007 Congressional Budget Justification
<http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/>

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promoting quality teaching, increasing girls' enrollment and completion of primary education, promoting greater community involvement, and increasing HIV/AIDS awareness. With USAID funding, a new curriculum has been developed and introduced in all six primary school grades. Thousands of teachers along with supervisors and school inspectors have received training to teach the new curriculum. USAID also financed the printing and distribution of more than 1 million textbooks. During the past decade, net enrollment rates for boys increased from 65 to 81 percent. While girls' enrollment rose from 32 percent to 58 percent, there is still a significant gap between boys' and girls' enrollment and successful completion of primary school. USAID works in communities with low girls' enrollment rates to remove obstacles to girls' education. The Ambassadors Girls' Scholarship Program provided scholarships to more than 900 girls who would otherwise be unable to continue their education. Mothers are specifically targeted with training that not only encourages them to send their daughters to school but also equips them with the necessary skills to increase their participation in school management.

PROMOTING FAMILY HEALTH

A low life expectancy of 53 years and high rates of maternal and child mortality reflect the reality that access to quality health care for many Beninese is limited. USAID is working with the Ministry of Health to increase the use of family health services and improve health care policies. USAID funds training of health workers to design and disseminate prevention messages for groups most at risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. Young people aged 15-24 are an important target group. USAID promotes the prevention and treatment of childhood illnesses through immunization, breastfeeding, the use of mosquito nets and the use of oral rehydration salts to treat diarrhea. USAID also trains health workers to prevent post-partum hemorrhage and manage obstetric emergencies; both are major causes of maternal deaths. Health workers also learn to care for newborns, to correctly treat childhood illnesses and to diagnose and treat sexually transmitted infections. USAID interventions over the past decade have focused on disadvantaged areas in northern Benin and have led to improvements in delivery of health services and increased use of family health services, which will improve the health of mothers and children under the age of five.